

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp On St. Croix Development: New Hotel, Paving Of Roads And New Flights In The Works

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ST. CROIX -- At his annual address to the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, Governor Kenneth Mapp laid out an optimistic outlook for the Big Island, mentioning projects ongoing and more to come that would help revitalize the St. Croix economy.

Among the projects, a long promised hotel development, which Mr. Mapp said was well underway with a branded hotel at the table. He said the Government of the Virgin Islands had authorized the first \$100,000 for consulting work between the G.V.I. and the branded hotel, [from the \\$1 million the legislature authorized in August 2016](#) to facilitate negotiations.

"They've already been on the island, there is a site that everyone's very, very interested in developing, and now all of the technical information and work is being done, and I believe in early summer I'm scheduled to travel to the mainland with the brand representatives again," Mr. Mapp said. "What we're looking at -- this is not all finalized -- but we're looking at a hotel project probably less than 150 rooms, which would also include villas and home sites." The governor said he could not reveal too much about the project, as everyone involved have signed confidentiality agreements.

Mr. Mapp also spoke about two new direct flights set to begin routes to St. Croix, which he said would help meet the upcoming season's travel demands. "One of them will be a new airline to St. Croix, and another one will be an existing airline but will be coming from negotiations were still ongoing.



Chamber of Commerce members at Breakfast

meeting with Governor Kenneth Mapp on Thursday, March 23, 2017. Event was held at the Palms at Pelican Cove. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert)

The territory's leader said his administration has signed an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration and Eastern Federal Lands, the latter being a subdivision of the Federal Highway System responsible for executing federal highway projects. The contract will see the government repurposing all the streets of Christiansted, Mr. Mapp said. Part of the project includes road work on King Cross Street and Prince Street to mitigate the flooding problem. "In any major rain, those become rivers," the governor said. The governor said a passage will be carved out of the underlay of the streets so that flood water coming from the hills would not affect homes and businesses, but rather find its way to the ocean.

He stressed that all the streets, not just the aforementioned, are set to be repurposed. Mr. Mapp did not give a timeline for the commencement or completion of work.

The government is also in talks with a private firm on the modernization of the territory's airport terminals. On cruise ships, Mr. Mapp said the Caribbean is currently experiencing a 12 percent surge in tourist traffic, which he said is based in large part on Americans wanting to stay closer to home. Some cruise lines are already redirecting their routes, he said, adding that St. Thomas and St. Croix should start benefiting from the additional calls.

While the trend is encouraging, Mr. Mapp said if the territory fails to prepare its infrastructure, guest experience here would suffer, ultimately damaging the territory's tourism product.

"We're trying to put our strategy in place and be able to work to accommodate the increase in the visitor traffic, and get the infrastructure repaired and in some modern way working for the community," he said.

The governor expressed concern about the Trump administration's plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Healthcare Act, widely known as Obamacare. Mr. Mapp said with roughly 24,000 Virgin Islanders on the expanded medicaid program that is part of the current healthcare law, "Any massive change to that program would have a severe impact to the Virgin Islands."

The meeting also served as a moment for the governor to rebuild a relationship with the Chamber of Commerce that had been battered by the recent sin tax debates. He accepted an olive branch offered by Chamber Chairperson Kimberly McCollum, who told the governor that members of the Chamber were willing to help with major decisions affecting business moving forward. Not to be outdone, the governor offered a peace offering of his own, stating that he was looking to fill seats on important government boards, many of which could be filled by Chamber members.

And in a realization of how bitter disputes could unintentionally bruise all parties involved, Mr. Mapp said he was in no way thinking of raising taxes again in the short term.

"I don't know, and I will not repeat the senior Bush's words about 'read my lips' or whatever the term was. But I am not prepared anytime in the short-term to talk about anymore increases in taxes," Mr. Mapp said as he chuckled. "I think we're all recovering from the bruising debate over the Economic Recovery and Revenue Enhancement bill."